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SUBJECT: MODERATE ISLAMIST JEMIL MANSOUR ON THE ELECTIONS
AND TAWASSOUL'S POST-ELECTORAL STRATEGY

Classified By: Ambassador Mark M. Boulware for Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) Summary: Tawassoul president and presidential candidate Jemil Ould Mansour -- who was among the first to accept President-elect Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz's victory -- believes the election was fair despite a number of irregularities. For Mansour, Tawassoul comes out of the crisis in a winning position, as it has established good relations with both the opposition and the majority camps and came out in fourth place despite its short existence and the difficult political climate that marked the election. Tawassoul is now focusing on the future, deciding whether the party will accept a potential Aziz offer to join the government or whether it will just participate as part of the democratic opposition. Mansour believes it is time to invest in stability and prosperity and sees itself as a link between the Aziz camp and the opposition. The party would welcome closer relations with the US and has very clear ideas on how Mauritania should position itself towards Israel and Iran. An Aziz offer to include Tawassoul in the government would come as a surprise in light of the military's strong rejection of moderate Islamists. It would also confirm rumors that Mansour struck a deal with Aziz. On the positive side, it would show an evolution in Mauritanian politics towards the inclusion of previously excluded political actors and ideologies. End summary.

TAWASSOUL AND THE FNDD

12. (C) PolOff met with Mansour on August 3 to hear his views on the election, the future of the Front National pour la Defense de la Democratie (FNDD) and the opposition, and inquire about Tawassoul's post-electoral strategy. A brimming Mansour, who seemed all too pleased with American attention, was accompanied by External Relations Managers Mohamed Lemine Ould Mohamed Moussa and Amar Ould Mohamed Najem.

13. (C) PolOff asked Mansour why Tawassoul, which had been an FNDD founding party and a staunch anti-coup force, had decided to launch Mansour's presidential candidacy instead of supporting an FNDD single candidacy. Mansour stated that Tawassoul viewed the FNDD as an anti-coup organization and not as a political one. After the signature of the Dakar Accord, Tawassoul felt consensus had been reached and decided to test its own political wings in the July 18 election.

Also, he stated Tawassoul felt that the other FNDD founding parties -- UFP, ADEL and APP -- were trying to impose presidential candidate Messaoud Ould Boulkheir without consulting Tawassoul. Reluctant to let others make political decisions in its stead, Tawassoul organized a National Assembly and found that 88 percent of its members supported a Tawassoul candidacy.

¶4. (C) Tawassoul is still an FNDD member, stressed Mansour, although it has not taken part in FNDD meetings recently. Comment: PolOff met the same day with FNDD rotating President Abdel Koudouss Abeidna, who stated he believed Tawassoul split from the FNDD the day it decided against supporting a Boulkheir candidacy. End comment.

THE ELECTIONS

¶5. (C) When asked about the outcome of the election, Mansour stressed that Tawassoul did not consider its percentage of the vote reflected the party's true political weight. The results were skewed by many factors, including insufficient time for campaigning; problems with the voter registration process for those registering following the Dakar Accord; disparities in campaign financing; and Aziz's unequal access to state resources to fund a populist campaign. Tawassoul is convinced that it has more supporters than those who voted for Mansour on the July 18 election and feels that its 4.57 percent is a satisfactory outcome for the party's first presidential candidacy under such difficult

NOUAKCHOTT 00000505 002 OF 003

circumstances.

¶6. (C) Mansour, who was among the first candidates to concede, explained that he sympathizes with those in the opposition who are convinced there was fraud. He believes they have a right to express their reservations. Nevertheless, Tawassoul feels that irregularities observed were not significant enough to change the election results. Mansour stated Tawassoul party representatives had seen cases of people who arrived to the polling station to find somebody else had voted in their place or to discover their names were not on the list despite the fact they had registered to vote. Tawassoul also witnessed widespread vote-buying operations.

¶7. (C) For Mansour, one of the lessons learned from the election is that, to a certain extent, there is a disconnect between the political class and the populace. According to Mansour, this is the first time in the history of Mauritania that a candidate has so heavily courted the lower classes. Aziz' use of media to publicize his populist activities is also a revolutionary concept. As a result, "the traditional political class was defeated by someone who is new to politics," said Mansour, who believes "there was a gap, an empty space that political parties failed to exploit." Moussa added that the crisis had transformed Mauritanian politics in that tribal leaders and businessmen had openly opposed the coup, which was unheard of in the past. "They came out in the open to oppose Aziz. That is something completely new," he stressed. Moussa believes that the crisis was a tribal issue as much as it was political. Nevertheless, the tribes were not united. Bits and pieces of tribes supported different actors and hedged their bets, putting their eggs in different baskets.

POST-ELECTION POLITICAL LANDSCAPE AND TAWASSOUL'S FUTURE

¶8. (C) In Mansour's view, the political landscape in Mauritania will be marked by three factions: Aziz's camp, which will potentially become larger as many will leave the opposition to join those in power; the democratic opposition composed of parties that accept the election results; and the

staunch opposition that rejects election results and the current regime.

¶9. (C) Mansour told PolOff Tawassoul is currently consulting with its members to decide whether it would accept a potential Aziz offer to join the government. A meeting will be held on August 5 to this effect. "There is a possibility the General may ask Tawassoul to participate in the government," intimated Mansour. Surprised by this statement, PolOff asked Mansour how had Tawassoul managed to get in the General's good graces after the military so ferociously opposed the formation of a moderate Islamist party, Tawassoul's inclusion in the government under former President Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi and even Tawassoul's participation in the post-Dakar Transitional Government of National Unity. "You will have to ask Aziz!" responded Mansour while laughing heartily. "We have overcome our differences," he added, visibly pleased with himself. He explained that Aziz's problem with Tawassoul holding the transitional government's Ministry of Islamic Affairs was not really an issue with Tawassoul itself but with the person nominated by Tawassoul. It was a tribal problem, underlined Moussa. Moktar Ould Mohamed Moussa, Mohamed Lemine Ould Mohamed Moussa's first cousin and Tawassoul's choice for minister of Islamic Affairs, is an Idekoub tribesman. The Idekoub, a small tribe from the Trarza and Inchiri regions, are divided between Aziz supporters and detractors. As a result, the tribe's relations with Aziz have been conflictual. According to Mansour and Moussa, Aziz could not stand the thought of an anti-coup Idekoub entering the government as that would make him lose "electoral face." To block the nomination, he claimed he had information stating that Moktar Ould Mohamed Moussa was in close relationship with radical Islamists. The International Contact Group (ICG) contacted Tawassoul about the nomination and Tawassoul denied all charges and refused to change it. When PolOff

NOUAKCHOTT 00000505 003 OF 003

highlighted once more how extraordinary she found that Aziz would ask Tawassoul to join the government, Mansour backtracked and stated "we are really discussing whether we want to ask him to ask us. If we decide that is the case, we will then pursue a nomination very actively." Comment: FNDD rotating President Abeidna has always claimed that Mansour "sold out" and struck some sort of deal with Aziz. In light of the information provided by Mansour, PolOff is inclined to believe Abeidna is on to something. Inviting Islamists to the government would be an out of character gesture on Aziz's part. End comment.

¶10. (C) Tawassoul believes that now is the time to start working together to help the country overcome the political crisis and strengthen democracy and stability. Tawassoul comes out of the crisis in a good position, as it has excellent relations with all the actors. Mansour believes it is Tawassoul's responsibility to continue encouraging consensus and dialogue among opposing factions. "This country is too fragile to withstand a prolonged crisis," he said. "We have to come together now or it will break." Comment: Mansour may be disappointed in his belief that he has good relations with the FNDD, particularly if Aziz invites Tawassoul to participate in the government. The FNDD would view such a gesture as a confirmation of Mansour's betrayal. End comment.

ON RELATIONS WITH THE US, IRAN AND ISRAEL

¶11. (C) Regarding the future, Mansour stated relations with the US are a priority for Tawassoul. "We are waiting for an invitation to Washington," exclaimed Mansour. "And we want to meet with President Obama," added Moussa while Mansour jokingly accused him of being too ambitious. "We want to tell Washington about our program and about our admiration

for the progressive model set by the Turkish Islamic party," said Mansour and added that Tawassoul is a party of young people who want to bring modernity and change to Mauritania.

¶12. (C) When asked about relations with Iran, Mansour stated that Aziz "was forced to join the resistance movement" by the US's refusal to accept the coup. He did it by force and not by choice, maintains Mansour. Mansour believes that Mauritania is too small a country to choose one side or the other. Mauritania needs balanced relations and cannot afford to play a bigger role than its means allow.

¶13. (C) As for Israel, Mansour believes that Mauritania should not re-establish relations with Israel until the Palestinian issue is solved in a fair and equitable manner. "We will judge them by their actions," said Moussa.

COMMENT

¶14. (C) Mansour and Tawassoul are potentially among the biggest winners emerging from Mauritania's ten-month political crisis. For a party that did not exist two years ago, coming in fourth place in such a contested election is not a bad outcome. Furthermore, Tawassoul could score a big victory if Aziz's offer to participate in the government materializes. The military accepting to include the moderate islamist party in the government would be a revolutionary concept in Mauritania. Nevertheless, such an offer would confirm some FNDD members' suspicions that Mansour may have betrayed the FNDD by striking a deal with Aziz. As with everything in Mauritania, the good and the bad often come together in the same package. End comment.

BOULWARE